



Town of Garrett Park

Incorporated 1898

December 23, 2010

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States House of Representatives
1707 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Van Hollen,

As you know, Garrett Park is a 112-year old independent municipality that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. We pride ourselves on our unique sense of community, which residents work hard to maintain. We appreciate the support that you have provided to the town and its residents over many years as our Representative and neighbor.

Today I am writing to seek your assistance and guidance concerning ongoing challenges we face vis-a-vis the US Post Office in Garrett Park. As I'm sure you are aware, the role of the Post Office in Garrett Park is irreplaceable and vital: residents elect to pick up their mail rather than have home delivery because they value the opportunity to meet one another at the Post Office, which functions as a gathering spot and central place for residents to learn the news of the Town. For decades the Post Office has been, in many ways, the institutional "glue" that holds the Town together.

Because of the indispensable role that the Post Office plays in the life of Garrett Park, the Town has consistently acted to facilitate its welfare. This included purchasing the building in which the Post Office operates, to insure its continued presence in Garrett Park. Several years ago, the Town built a new facility for the Post Office; most recently, we acceded to a rent reduction requested by the USPS. Although the Town of Garrett Park, in common with other state and local governments, faces serious financial challenges, the Town consented to that rent cut because we realize that the Postal Service faces even more difficult economic difficulties. We believe that other steps can be taken to improve revenue at the Garrett Park Post Office and, not incidentally, improve service for its patrons.

As Mayor of the Town, I receive a large volume of resident comment about the Post Office. The Town government, as a significant user of postal services, also has a keen interest in the wellbeing of the Post Office. Changes over the past year at the Garrett Park Post Office concern us greatly and have caused non-

trivial inconvenience for residents. This is especially acute during this holiday period. I summarize our concerns here, together with the Town's requests for steps that would facilitate greater use of the Post Office and thus enhance its revenue. Conversations with the Postal Service, in general, have not been fruitful.

Hours of retail operation. The Garrett Park Post Office is adjacent to the commuter rail station; since the inception of the Post Office, retail counter times were geared to commuter hours, with a mid-day closing. In recent years, these hours were 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. weekdays; Saturday hours were 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. With the curtailed hours now in force (9 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, and 9-noon on Saturdays), many residents find it impossible to retrieve packages and use the retail services of the Post Office, including purchasing stamps, mailing packages, and using any service (such as Express Mail, registered mail, insured mail, etc.) that requires over-the-counter handling. (Patrons can retrieve mail from their mail boxes at any hour that the lobby is open, but not parcels that are too large to fit in mailboxes.)

WE ASK that the Postal Service restore earlier opening times and later closing times by reinstating the mid-day break on weekdays, and reinstate the four-hour opening on Saturday. If that is not possible, we ask that the retail counter hours be modified to extend either before or after commuter hours on at least three days each week, and the four-hour opening on Saturday be resumed.

Parcel pick-up. Box holders who retrieve mail from their mailbox sometimes find a notice that the Post Office is holding a package for pick-up by the box holder. Residents can obtain delivery of the package only during hours that the retail counter is open. Owing to the drastically curtailed hours that the counter is now open, many residents are particularly frustrated by their inability to pick up parcels. For a box holder who works conventional hours, only the reduced Saturday hours are feasible; for some, even that narrow once-a-week window of opportunity is insufficient.

WE ASK that, in addition to restoration of longer counter hours, the Postal Service install a 'Dutch door' or similar device that permits residents to obtain parcels during periods when the retail counter is closed but Post Office personnel are still on-site. We note that the current location of the Post Office is secure and there is an existing door that could be easily adapted to this use.

Bulk mail. Recent changes in USPS procedures with respect to bulk mail have had a significant adverse effect on the ability of the Town government of Garrett Park, the Garrett Park Citizens Association, and other bulk-mail permit holders to make timely communications within town. Because nearly all Garrett Park residents are mail box holders, it was possible for bulk mail permit holders – most notably the Town government and the Citizens Association – to

communicate rapidly and efficiently with Garrett Park residents. The new procedures require all bulk mail to be submitted for mailing at a regional center, not at Garrett Park, for processing before being returned to Garrett Park for distribution. This is an inefficient, unnecessary step that costs the Postal Service additional funds (handling at the service center, return transport to Garrett Park), imposes considerable time and cost on bulk mail users (the trip to Shady Grove is about 20 miles, round trip), as well as generating unnecessary vehicle pollution in all aspects. Most critically, it introduces delays of one to three days in mail delivery, thus effectively removing bulk mail as a viable option for the Town government and other mailers to communicate with residents. The policy also results in lower revenue to the Garrett Park Post Office. Former bulk-mailers are *not* converting to first-class mail, but are refraining from mailing at all.

***WE ASK* that the Postal Service restore the ability of the Garrett Park Post Office to receive and handle bulk mail (i) submitted by a mailer holding a Garrett Park-issued bulk mail permit and (ii) destined solely for Garrett Park Post Office boxes.**

With the changes we outline above, we are confident that the Garrett Park Post Office can better serve its patrons, enhance its revenue and more fully contribute to the health of the US Postal Service. We look forward to hearing from you and your team regarding this matter.

Very truly yours,
Chris Keller
Chris Keller, Mayor

cc: District Office
51 Monroe Street, Suite 507
Rockville, MD 20850